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Litton plant removes last of toxic sludge



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RCRA RECORDS CENTER

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The last truckload of hazardous-metal sludge has been hauled away from the wastewater lagoon at Litton Industries, and today the company's general manager looked toward healthier times.

"We're in the business of making circuitry boards, not cleaning up sludges," said Ron Enos of Litton. "Now that the cleanup's done, all we're going to do is put grass on (the area) and mow it."

Enos is confident that grass, indeed, will grow there — after spending more than \$250,000 to assure it. That was the cost of the state ordered clean-up, which rid the three-acre site of nearly 12 million gallons of toxic wastes. The project was completed more than a week ago, and now Enos said, "We're just waiting for the grass to grow."

This will be no small achievement, said Department of Natural Resources officials, considering that the area was so badly contaminated in March that it was declared an emergency. DNR officials then were concerned that toxic material from the fragile lagoon would seep into the groundwater.

Today, DNR officials said they are certain that groundwater was contaminated during the seven years the lagoon operated, but they also said the problem has been resolved.

"There's no doubt about the contamination before," said Burt McCullough, an environmental specialist with the DNR's Springfield office. "But now we really don't think any more is going to happen."

The cleanup was monitored closely by DNR experts who said they made certain that soil samples fell within agreed-upon contamination standards. Soil standards are not set by the federal government, so representatives from Litton and the state agency decided upon safe and reasonable levels, McCullough said.

The standards set the maximum amount of metals at 250 milligrams per kilogram of soil, which McCullough said is not much more than the 100 milligrams that occurs in the ground naturally.

Two feet of additional soil was put on top of the site, and then it was graded to enhance runoff after heavy rains. Together, the action should prevent rainwater from shifting the remaining metals concentrations to other areas, McCullough said.

During the cleanup, about 100 coal-sized trucks were used, carrying 2,000 cubic yards of the sludge to a chemical waste dump in Joliet, Ill. The trucks, owned by a national disposal company called Chemical Waste Management Inc., were covered and plastic-lined, said McCullough.

"We're just glad to see it's finally over," he said. "It's been a chronic problem for years."

Meanwhile Litton continues to pretreat its wastewater

and dispose of toxic metals from that process at a site in Joliet, Ill., and then send the remaining wastewater to the Northwest Sewage Treatment Plant. Although the plant is located to near capacity, the Litton wastes are handled appropriately, said Bob Schaefer, supervisor of sanitary services for the city.

He said Litton constantly monitors its wastewater to assure that it is within standards, and officials from his de-

partment spot-check it as well.

"We've had plant upsets since they came on line," said Schaefer, referring to two fish kills that occurred on the Little Sac River after Litton joined the system in March. "But we had upsets before, too. As far as we can tell, they weren't Litton's fault."

Litton accounts for about 100,000 of the plant's daily load of 3.5 million gallons of wastewater. Because of the demands put on the industry when it switched from its lagoon system to the present pretreatment method, Schaefer said the limits imposed on Litton were conservative — and temporary.

"But they were high enough so that we were safe," said Schaefer. "It's just that we wouldn't be able to handle (additional similar industries) if those limits were kept."

Litton's present limits are in effect until January 1984. Unless problems arise at the plant, they will not be changed before that time, Schaefer said, but afterwards